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ABSTRACT

Citizen involvement in the education process and teachers' perceptions of such involvement as threatening to their professional autonomy are examined in this report. The principal has the potential to be a moderating variable in this relationship. Community involvement and participation may be viewed in the context of a continuum ranging from informational exchange between school and community to actual citizen participation in policy-making and implementation. However, as citizen participation increases, the potential threat to teacher autonomy norms increases accordingly. If a principal wished to eliminate the norm of teacher autonomy, a functional equivalent would need to provide teachers with the same security previously derived from this norm. Two hypotheses are suggested. First, principals who support teacher discretion tend to reduce teacher autonomy defenses. Second, as defensive aspects of the teacher autonomy norm decrease, teacher receptivity to community involvement and participation increases. A model describing four types of schools is offered: (1) healthy, supporting both teacher autonomy and community input; (2) defensive, supporting high teacher autonomy but low community input; (3) anemic, supporting neither teacher autonomy nor input from the community; and (4) paradoxical, supporting high community input but low teacher autonomy.
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THE PRINCIPAL, TEACHER AUTONOMY AND THE
SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP

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In examining the data produced from the responses of 163 reputedly "effective" high school principals, indicative of their attitudes and perceptions about community involvement in schools, a majority of these principals seemed to associate community involvement with increased support of the school by the community, more positive community attitudes about school and better student conduct. These same principals also tended to suggest some possible limitations of community involvement: domination of the process by a vocal few; a possible reduction in the ability of the school to take quick, decisive action; and the possibility that policy making will become a cumbersome process. While less than a majority of these principals were willing to attribute student learning gains to community involvement, they seemed to suggest that the positive outcomes of community involvement usually outweighed possible liabilities. On the other hand, nearly 77% of the principals polled either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that: "Although teachers generally give rhetorical support for citizen participation, they feel threatened by it" (McCleary and Hines, 1980).

Given an understanding of the notion that school organizations are usually marked by a relatively high degree of public vulnerability (Bidwell, 1965) i.e., that taxpayers have a right to question and hold their schools accountable, it may not be surprising that principals and teachers appear sensitive to both the assets and possible liabilities of community involvement in schools. With respect to recent resource scarcity and varying degrees of public discontent about declining achievement scores, teacher strikes and the competence of high school graduates, there appears to be little in our contemporary experience

which suggests a reduction in the public vulnerability characterization of schools. In this context, when teachers say to the public, "Come on in and visit my class anytime!", one is left wondering how teachers would react if people really took them up on the invitation, resulting in a continuous stream of questioning citizens moving in and out of classrooms. Would teachers welcome or resist such involvement? Again, according to the sample of "effective" principals noted above, it is suggested that teachers would often be threatened by such occurrences.

Purpose

As a follow-up to the survey responses of 163 "effective" high school principals, McCleary and Hines (1980) conducted regional conferences involving small groups of principals thought to possess exemplary school community relations skills. The author of this paper, a faculty member in educational administration at a cooperating university, helped conduct one such conference and had an opportunity to review survey results and conference transcripts. The purpose of this paper is to speculate about the perceptions of the various principals involved in this project, particularly in terms of the relationship between citizen involvement and possible teachers' perception of such involvement as being threatening to their professional autonomy. Viewed as a possible moderating variable in this relationship, the role or performance of the principal is an additional focus of analysis.

Definitions

In speculating about these theoretical relationships and possible implications for practice in the principalship, it appears necessary to define certain terms or constructs. Specifically, community involvement and partici-

pation, the norm of teacher autonomy, principal support for teacher autonomy, teacher receptiveness to community and functional equivalency all seem to be fruitful perspectives or variables.

Community Involvement and Participation

Figure 1 represents a generalization derived from an analysis of participating principals' responses with respect to perceived levels of community involvement or participation present in their school organizations. Based in part on these perceptions, it may be helpful to define involvement as school-community activity supportive of school policy making and participation as actual school-community policy-making and implementation activity. Suggested is a continuum ranging from involvement activity such as regular "question and answer" meetings with concerned parents to participation activity such as citizen membership on a school policy-making body.

(figure 1 goes about here)

In terms of this continuum at least five general levels of community involvement or participation are apparent: informational exchange between school and community (probably the least participative in nature); mechanisms which facilitate the "blowing-off of steam" related to frustrations community members may have about the operation of their schools; the use of citizens to help define school problems; citizens making policy recommendations; and actual citizen participation in policy making and implementation (probably the most participative in nature). These levels are presented hierarchically, suggesting that those activities closer to the apex involve higher degrees of actual participation than those at lower levels.

For instance, principals noted that "ventilating groups" composed of

community members (elected in some cases, appointed or volunteers in other cases) and school representatives would meet regularly to simply exchange information and answer questions about school operation. Sometimes these meetings, often with no agendas, would allow citizens an opportunity to vent frustrations or "blow off steam" in relatively harmless and productive ways. Other principals reported using community representatives, at least in part, as formal problem definition teams to identify important areas of concern for school staff to address in the coming year(s). Advisory groups that actually make recommendations for organizational change, particularly with respect to controversial topics like a drug abuse policy, were in operation in some schools. As one principal noted, "A parent advisory group's recommendations brought about a student smoking area in our school." There was even mention of citizen participation on the principal's policy-making council in some high schools or as part of a committee responsible for implementing certain programs.

The Norm of Teacher Autonomy

Lortie (1975) has noted that teacher sentiments do not favor close supervision of their work. These sentiments appear to be manifest in the norms of the teacher group, promoting teacher defensiveness over classroom activity. Teachers often say, "Let's face it, there is no best way to teach. I know the teaching methods that fit me best. I'm a professional, let me decide what to do in my own classroom."

These expressions of autonomy hold that the teacher is the legitimate classroom authority and rightfully holds discretionary power over matters such as instructional processes, pupil control, motivation and evaluation. According to this norm of teacher autonomy, no teaching colleague, adminis-

trator or community member may threaten this authority. The normative power or strength of the teacher autonomy norm is probably best understood in terms of its regulatory influence, influencing members of the teacher group to conform through the use of peer pressure or through group resistance to external efforts to limit teacher discretion or autonomy (Packard, 1976). As an example, a parent advisory group might consider a recommendation to the high school principal mandating parent evaluations of teaching as part of the school's process of instructional supervision, but as they consider such a recommendation, they must also understand its potential threat to teacher autonomy and probable resistance it would generate among teachers in that school.

As figure 1 suggests, as citizen participation levels increase, so does the potential threat to the teacher autonomy norm. However, it is important to note that the norm of autonomy does not necessarily prohibit cooperation and collaboration between teachers and others, citizens or parents for instance. Instead it holds that such cooperation should not be required, but dependent on the discretion of the teacher or the teacher group. As a consequence, it is important to remember that while citizen participation may be potentially threatening to teacher autonomy, teacher sentiments suggest that they reserve the right to cooperate or resist external participation as they see fit (Packard, 1976).

Principal Support for Autonomy

If we assume that the norm of teacher autonomy provides teachers with a relatively predictable environment and security against the possible threat of outside interference in the conduct of their classrooms, then it becomes apparent that anything a principal does to alter the structure of teacher

relations with others in the school and community can be construed to enhance or reduce the stability of the teachers' work environment. Those things principals do which support autonomy, i.e., enforcement of rules about classroom visitation or involving teachers in decision-making processes, might be viewed as reducing the possibility of threat to teacher autonomy. Principals who routinely drop in unexpectedly to evaluate teacher performance or who exclude teachers from important school committees might be viewed as acting in ways that threaten teacher autonomy.

Teacher Receptiveness to Community

Teacher receptivity to community or community involvement might be understood on an "open - closed" continuum. While the survey results seem to suggest that teachers are generally threatened by community involvement or participation, there may be considerable variation in teacher sentiments about community from one specific situation to another. In some schools or under certain circumstances, teachers might be relatively open or receptive to community participation, encouraging community input into policy making and classroom organization. In other situations, teachers may be relatively closed or unreceptive to community relationships, dragging their feet and maintaining their defenses against community influence. In some cases, teacher openness or receptivity might be associated with a reduction in the relative defensiveness of the teacher autonomy norm.

Functional Equivalency

The elements of functional analysis (Merton, 1968) and its applications to school organizations involve the notion that the structural features of schools can be understood in terms of their functions or consequences for

the adjustment and adaption of certain positions or roles in their organizational settings and from the standpoint of the adaption of the organization to the larger environment (Willower, 1970; and Thompson, 1967). The norm of teacher autonomy, for instance, might be viewed in terms of its consequences for the role of teacher, i.e., that it tends to increase their control over their work environment, thereby making it more stable and predictable. This norm also tends to control or sometimes even exclude community input into classroom and school operation, suggesting a way teachers tend to adapt or adjust to the school's external environment. While these latent or unrecognized consequences of the teacher autonomy norm may have relatively positive or functional outcomes for teachers, they may also be viewed with respect to their negative or dysfunctional consequences for the school-community relationship, often inhibiting public influence in school policy making.

Merton (1968) has noted that those who seek organizational change without notice of intended and latent consequences performed by the structures to be changed engage in social ritual rather than social engineering. The concept of functional equivalency suggests that the elimination or modification of organizational structure must be accomplished by replacing the unwanted structure with alternative structure that will fulfill the functions or outcomes formerly provided by the one abolished or modified. Structures that do this are called functional equivalents (Willower, 1970). For instance, if school principals wished to reduce or eliminate the norm of teacher autonomy, they would have to replace the norm with structure that routinely provides teachers with the same security previously derived from this norm. The hope of those principals might be that the new structure will provide the same outcomes as the old structure, but with fewer or none of the unwanted outcomes of the old structure.

Some Hypotheses

The idea of functional equivalency may suggest some insight about the relationship between community, principal and the norm of teacher autonomy. For instance, if we speculate that the norm of teacher autonomy provides teachers with security against the threat of external limitation of their classroom discretionary powers, then it becomes apparent that anything a principal does to change or influence the norm, in order to be supported by teachers, must provide the same security afforded previously by the norm. While more than one structural alternative may be possible, let's focus solely on the principal's behavior as a possible functional equivalent and present the following hypothesis:

- H₁: As teacher perceptions of the principal's support for their autonomy increases, the more defensive aspects of the teacher autonomy norm decrease.

The suggestion implicit in H₁ is that principals who nurture and support teacher discretion tend to reduce the need for the autonomy defenses of teachers. Certainly, a principal could act in ways that support autonomy but also reduce the degree of public input in school policy making. Such a principal might attempt to protect teacher autonomy by "stonewalling" community suggestions about policy changes or complaints about school operation. While this might be construed to be an example of functional equivalency, this principal's support has done little good since negative or dysfunctional elements of former structure were also preserved. The strength of the autonomy norm may have been reduced (perhaps leading to improved principal-teacher relationships) but without necessarily enhancing the school-community relationship.

Instead, principal behaviors which support teacher autonomy and enhance

the school-community relationships might be more appropriate examples. For instance, principals participating in the regional conferences noted above reported that teacher service on school-community advisory committees (non-mandatory, discretionary service) often involved teachers and the public in ways that were relatively nonthreatening to teachers. Teacher participation in the selection, orientation and assignment of community volunteers to work in classrooms might be another example of a program principals noted that enhanced community relationships and teacher discretionary power. Such behavior by principals in implementing and monitoring programs that do not threaten teacher autonomy but improve school-community relationships may suggest⁷ second hypothesis:

H₂: As the more defensive aspects of the teacher autonomy norm decrease, teacher receptivity to community involvement and participation increases.

In developing school-community advisory or policy making groups, allowing teachers to freely chose their levels of participation and the nature of participation, principals suggested that the more defensive aspects of the teacher autonomy norm could be reduced and teacher openness or receptivity to community could be enhanced. Again, it is probably important to recall that the meaning of teacher autonomy does not necessarily prohibit teacher support of community involvement and participation, but holds that involvement with community in school decision making should be dependent on teacher discretion. The structures noted above probably tend to tap the best features of the autonomy norm while minimizing its more dysfunctional aspects. More coercive attempts by principals to elicit teacher-community cooperation, however well-intentioned, are probably less likely to produce the same type

of results with respect to teacher receptiveness to the public.

A Model

As figure 2 depicts, a principal's behavior or performance might be viewed as having at least two dimensions in terms of improving community involvement and participation: behavior supportive of teacher autonomy; and behavior which encourages community input in school decision making. If we can describe each type of behavior on a simplistic "high-low" continuum, a two by two matrix emerges for illustrative purposes. The matrix can be described in terms of four quadrants, each suggestive of a certain type of situation with respect to school and community. As an example, quadrant A might describe a school situation in which the degree of principal support for teacher autonomy and the degree of principal encouragement of community input are both relatively high. This quadrant is also characterized by relatively open teacher receptivity (connoted by a "+" symbol). The opposite situation is described in quadrant C, characterized by relatively closed teacher receptivity to community (connoted by a "-" symbol). Let's consider each quadrant as descriptive of certain general types of school situations which might emerge from a natural mix of the variables noted in the hypotheses. As a high school principal, which fits your school situation best?

(figure 2 goes about here)

Quadrant A: The Healthy School. As noted above this situation involves a principal who nurtures and supports both teacher autonomy and community input. As a result, using the words of principals participating in the conferences noted above, "there is plenty of fresh air and ventilation between school and community". In this school situation teachers tend to exhibit a relative openness to such relationships and a relative absence of defensive-

ness about their professional autonomy. Principal, teachers, students and public probably interact in ways that lead to ongoing examination of programs and objectives, perhaps even some experimentation. Community involvement and participation are observable in the everyday operation of the school. Traumatic school-community clashes are possible, but tend to be resolved in open and productive ways.

Quadrant B: The Defensive School. This situation is characterized by relatively high degrees of principal support for teacher autonomy, relatively low degrees of encouragement of community input and relatively closed teacher receptiveness to community. While teachers and principal may be working cooperatively on school programs, they tend to resist community input based on the belief that the professional staff alone knows what is best for its students. Public relations and involvement, like parents nights or newsletters, tend to be emphasized over actual community participation. This situation sometimes becomes traumatic should the school and community become polarized over differences about school operation and purposes.

Quadrant C: The Anemic School. As noted above, this school involves a principal who supports and encourages neither teacher autonomy nor community input. Teacher receptivity to community may be either ambivalent or closed. Teachers are on their own, and as a consequence, teacher autonomy and discretion are probably the order of each day. Teachers and principal probably emphasize "doing your own thing". They exhibit ambivalence with respect to school goals, community needs and values, and give only lip service to coordination efforts. Community relations, predominantly at involvement levels, tend to be seen as chores of the school year.

Given the multiple and autonomous definitions about classroom and school operations, this situation is probably resistant to change and relatively crisis-oriented. The principal may often be placed in the precarious position of defending teacher behavior he/she neither understands nor condones. In mediating these disputes, neither teachers nor parents are satisfied. Compared to the 'ventilation' characteristic of healthy schools, it is interesting to note that the symptoms of anemia are typically weakness and breathlessness.

Quadrant D: The Paradoxical School. Characterized by the principal's low degree of support for teacher autonomy and the principal's high degrees of support for community input, this school might best be seen as a paradox from the public's point of view. The principal invites the public in to meet and work with teachers who are relatively closed in terms of their receptivity to community. While teachers give polite overt support to the principal's community efforts, covertly they probably feel a degree of hostility about his/her apparent lack of support for their professional discretion and act in ways that subtly undermine his/her community efforts. While involvement type activities are the most successful elements of school-community relations, largely do to the principal's efforts, the principal can often be heard to lament that community participation efforts always seem to dissipate due to dwindling interest. Until this well-intentioned administrator increases his/her understanding of structural-functional relationships, his/her attempts to improve the school-community relationship are doomed to be examples of Merton's (1968) social rituals rather than authentic community involvement and participation.

Conclusion

The relationships and typology presented in this paper are tentative and speculative in nature. Speculation is based on only a small part of a large data base produced by McCleary and Hines (1980) and this author's interpretation of the comments made by principals thought to possess exemplary school-community skills. The purpose of the discussion was more to present food for thought and variables potentially helpful to principals trying to enhance the school-community relationship than to present the foundation of a distinct research proposal.

The discussion was relatively simplistic; little was done to deal with complex intervening variables like the impact of collective bargaining on school-community relations. Little advice of a prescriptive nature was presented. Instead, this author suggested only theoretical constructs which might be applicable when generalized to particular school situations. The questions of how to reduce the defensive aspects of the teacher autonomy norm or increase community input in a particular high school setting are left to the practicing school principal. Perhaps one starting point for reflection might be the school situation typology above. Which type fits your situation best? Given the variables and relationships noted above, what could be done next to improve your organization's relationship with its community?

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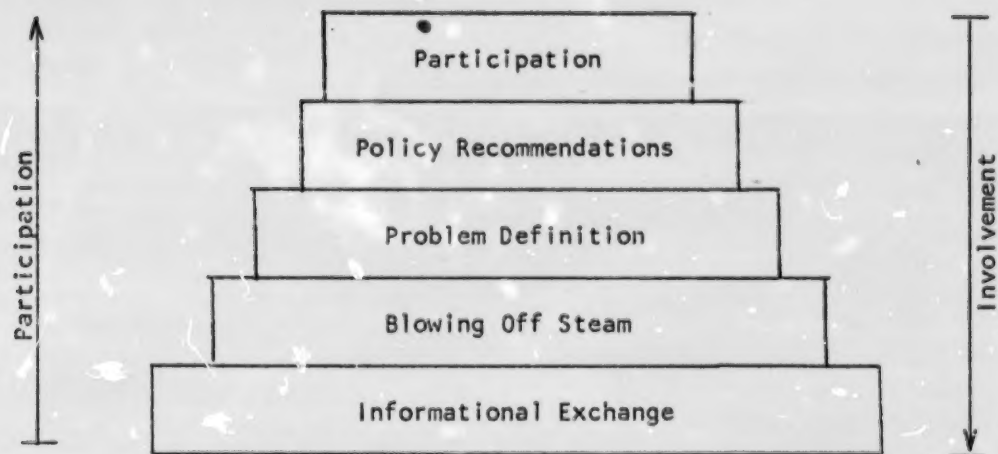


Figure 1.. Levels of School-Community Involvement and Participation.

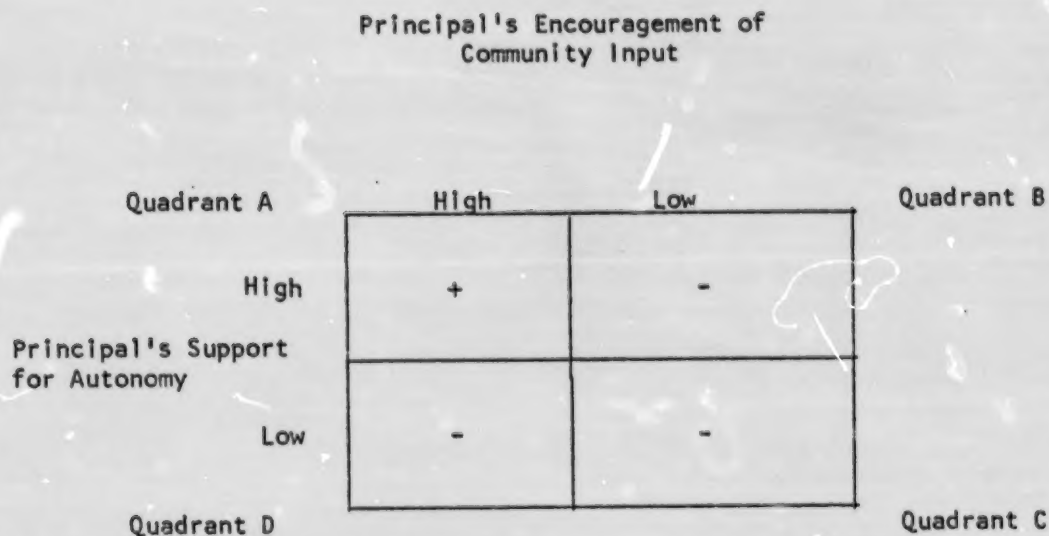


Figure 2. A Model: School-Community Situations.